



An "Italian Grimm": Domenico Comparetti and the Nationalization of Italian Folktales

Author(s): COLIN JOHNSON

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Notes and Discussions

An “Italian Grimm”: Domenico Comparetti and the Nationalization of Italian Folktales.

Ci sono, a mio vedere, due sistemi per fare un’antologia di fiabe popolari. Uno è quello scientifico di riportare le fiabe nei vari dialetti, dando di esse le varianti, l’apparato bibliografico, ecc . . . L’altro è di offrire una antologia di testi poetici, senza nessuna preoccupazione di carattere filologico. E tanto meno regionale.—Giuseppe Cocchiara (Calvino, “Cocchiara” 398)

With the success of their *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, the Grimm brothers initiated a widespread cultural and academic movement based upon the collection of popular folktales and lore, which often highlighted the nationalizing capacity of popular traditions. Russia bred Afanasiev; France turned back to Perrault for its heritage. In Italy, the search for a national collection of tales was a similarly political task, but possibly more complex. After the country’s unification in 1861 (or 1870 if one considers the conquering of Rome the Nation’s true birth), scholars of popular traditions gained a prominent role in academia. Finally unified geographically, Italy began to search for a certain “Italian spirit” that many believed to be latent in the popular arts of smaller communities. Given that Italy was still a fractured state—politically and linguistically—the collected material was naturally linked to regionalist sentiments, and so tended to be presented in the dialect of the area from which it came. Thus, the “Italian” *popolo* was—practically and literarily—decidedly non-national. Beginning in 1860, Vittorio Imbriani, Alessandro D’Ancona, Giuseppe Pitre, and other scholars published various collections of songs and stories from Tuscany, Piedmont, Sicily, and other regions, transcribed in dialect with historical and conservational intent. In 1875, however, among these regionalist works, Domenico Comparetti composed *Novelline Popolari Italiane*, which comprised folktales from many Italian regions, translated from the dialects into the “lingua comune” or “common language.” This nationalizing linguistic element and the varied origins of the texts themselves distinguished Comparetti from other collectors, both in practice and in theory.

Published in an academic environment full of conservational (and therefore regionalist) sentiments, at least in regards to popular traditions, Comparetti’s interregionalist effort was denounced by folklorists of the time. The philologist promised two additional volumes of the

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Novelline, but these were never completed. Due to this “failure,” the collection was effectively forgotten by Italian scholars: only Henry Charles Coote, a nineteenth-century English folklorist, penned a commentary on the work. Comparetti’s anthology was not recognized as a spirited surge toward a national folktale tradition until the second World War, in an environment newly filled with nationalistic sentiments. Italo Calvino first noted Comparetti’s intent, in fact, in those years in which the author dedicated himself to the translation and rewriting of material collected by nineteenth-century folklorists with the goal of creating a national collection of folktales. In the introduction to his *Fiabe Italiane*, Calvino claims that while early collectors created “una montagna di narrazioni tratte dalla bocca del popolo nei vari dialetti . . . Un ‘Grimm italiano’ non venne alla luce, sebbene già nel 1875 il Comparetti avesse tentato una raccolta generale di più regioni” (IX). Already in this first (though brief) analysis of Comparetti’s nationalistic intentions, Calvino recognized the inability of the *Novelline* to reach the Grimms’ standard, and considered the work an unrealized dream, a collection “ridotta a un freddo compendio” (XXII). The “Italian Grimm” should have been “. . . anche libro piacevole da leggere, popolare per destinazione e non solo per fonte” (“Fiabe italiane” X). Though held in high consideration as a partial ideological model, according to Calvino the nineteenth-century work was too rigid: through the translation into the “lingua comune,” Comparetti dampened the linguistic fervor of the dialects, and neglected to reintegrate any poetic additions of his own. As the above-cited words of Giuseppe Cocchiara suggest, a collection of folktales must be direct in its scope: either philological or poetic. While Comparetti’s own logic justifies his choices, it does not adhere strictly to either of these categories. The following commentary will explain in more detail the ways in which Domenico Comparetti strove to nationalize folktales in Italy, the methods with which he organized his texts, and the reasons (or speculations) for which his collection did not gain recognition.

In the analysis of the so-called “Italian Grimm” ideal, it is necessary to trace the process through which Comparetti constructed his veritable corpus of folktales. To begin with, he turned solely to fables and fairytales to represent popular traditions on a national level, making a distinction among the socio-cultural, linguistic, and literary natures of popular legends, songs, and stories. According to many scholars, legends, proverbs, and popular songs in Italy were always considered to be of a strictly local character. Calvino declared in the introduction to *Fiabe Italiane* that legends were “un campo del tutto diverso da quella della fiaba” (XVIII); he added: “insomma, era un materiale inutilizzabile ai fini del mio lavoro” (XVIII), that being the creation of the national corpus. And even if Herder’s *Volkslieder* presented popular songs as representative of that “German spirit” contemporarily with

the Grimms' tales, in Italy the socio-cultural and linguistic fracturing of the country rendered the idea of a collection of "national songs" almost unthinkable. As early as 1870, Comparetti commented in a letter to Giuseppe Pitré: "la poesia popolare della nostra nazione varia assai in certe zone del nostro paese e si mostra in queste per forme differenti. Quindi per quanto concerne i canti popolari non v'ha dubbio che si possa anzi convenga dare in volumi separati quelli di ciascuna provincia od anche di più ristretta località" ("Epistolario" 280). Calvino noted in regards to his own research: "cercar di tradurre dei canti popolari dialettali sarebbe impresa assurda: là è il verso, la parola che conta" ("Fiabe Italiane" XXI). Claudio Morazzini separated folktales and songs when he spoke of popular literatures and the question of a national language. If his discourse on songs was in fact on a national scale, it was so solely in regards to their linguistic capacity, and treated only collections of Tuscan songs, which were already written in "Italian." Contemporarily to Niccolò Tommaseo, who searched for a common cultural heritage among the Tuscan countryside, collectors of material from other regions, such as Giuseppe Ferraro and Domenico Beffa, dismissed the idea of a "fondo comune"—or "common ground"—that connected songs from different regions in Italy (Morazzini 105–122). Therefore, only folktales could occupy a national role: while popular songs were regionalist (by origin, content, and language), folktales were "uguali dappertutto" (Calvino, "Fiabe Italiane" XIX). Essentially, it was this sense of natural unity within folktales that allowed Comparetti (and later, Calvino) to impose a national patrimony upon the ever-prevalent regionalism of the Italian tradition.

Comparetti's principal work was the translation of dialectal texts into Italian in order to deliver them to a broader public. At the base of this operation resided the usual question surrounding translation, fundamentally linked to the famous differentiation made by Friedrich Schleiermacher at the beginning of the nineteenth century: the translator could bring the reader to the text so that the work was accessible by a large audience, or he could bring the text to the reader so that the work was more acceptable, or familiar. A brief discussion of translation is essential to the analysis of the national collections of Italian folktales (both here, to Comparetti's, and elsewhere, in consideration of Calvino's). Comparetti promoted the fidelity of his translations, maintaining the stylistic details of each narrator so that the *Novelline* would be considered scientific or historical documents in vein with other folklorists of his time. He wrote a literal translation that strove to make regional folktales accessible to Italian readers, thereby creating a national tradition.

In addition to translation, Comparetti had to approach the inherent complexity of the "unification" of popular folktales. The quest for nationalism directly opposed the regionalist trends that dominated the

study of popular traditions in Italy. This national-regional opposition gave way to three additional theoretical problems. The first was a conflict between the poetry and the science of folktales: in order to realize a national unity among these traditionally regionalist texts, Comparetti had to maintain a vision of his folktales that went against the strictly documental and conservational motives of scientific folklorists. He had to manage his stories in part as if they were purely literary texts; vehicles for certain themes, fantasies, and hopes common to all Italian people. But through his vision of the “common ground,” the organizer explicitly sided himself against those folklorists who considered each story a recording of a specific cultural and linguistic moment. The second problem was an ideological opposition between the “rewritten” text and the “transcribed” text (this problem is discussed in regards to Calvino’s *Fiabe* in Clemente 110): merely through the act of translation, Comparetti abandoned absolute fidelity to popular dictation, which was so desirable in the texts transcribed by other nineteenth-century scholars. The philologist still claimed a certain scientific value within his literal translations, as he avoided a more literary “rewriting” of the texts; but still, most folklorists affirmed the need to faithfully transcribe the words of the narrator, even if presented in a language unattainable by all but a minute population. The third polemic was that between the macrotext (the anthology in general) and the microtext (the individual tale): collectors who might wish to create a collection of tales, and above all one with a national character, needed to keep in mind the unity of the book as a whole. Factors such as a definitive language, stylistic continuity, and the presentation of thematic and narrative consistencies became primary criteria in order for each story to be part of a greater literary body. Comparetti entreated the “common language” to impart this unity. In this manner, the fidelity to each microtext was superseded by the need to construct a macrotext—at least in regards to language. It will be discussed further on how Comparetti’s literal translations rendered the *Novelline* inaccessible to a national public despite the common linguistic foundation. Ultimately, in order to realize the “Italian Grimm,” Comparetti would have also had to remove certain elements in each tale—the very details that kept it glued to a minute, but real population. It would have been necessary, as Cocchiara notes, to work with no concern for philological character; and Comparetti’s essentially academic background prevented this extreme. While translation distanced his tales from the cultural moment that created them, fidelity to narrative particulars withheld them from a universal public.

Comparetti—a philologist and an archeologist—maintained a certain esteem for the sociocultural and scientific aspects of folktales. His translations, and the preceding choice of the “best” version of each story, were the only interventions he imposed. In this way, his movement

toward a unified macrotext was cut short in favor of a limited fidelity to the microtext: different styles of each narrator are left in tact, and traces of the original dialects reside in various expressions, in dialogue, and in local references that may confound a foreign reader ("foreign" in relation to the minute community from where the tale originated). Always at the base of the projects, however, rested the nationalist vision, driven by the use of the "common language:" that sense of a "common ground" uniting regionalist traditions supported all of Comparetti's operations and allowed his tales to be dubbed "Italian" rather than "Tuscan" or "Sicilian." The collection therefore came to occupy a sort of middle ground in respect to the oppositions previously outlined. Intended for scholars but unacceptable as scientific documents, the work was also ineffective as a "pleasurable" book (at least according to Calvino's specifications) due to stylistic heterogeneity.

Domenico Comparetti and folklore in Italy.

In reality, German scholars were the first to collect popular material from Italy, always with the intention of investigating "lo spirito della nazione e i suoi costumi" (Rubini 52). Scholars such as Philipp Joseph von Rehfues, with his journal "Italien" (1803–1804), extended their Romantic interests in German popular traditions to Italian ones, and inspired a type of scholastic tourism for German travelers in Italy. On the heels of this movement, Laura Gonzenbach published *Sicilianische Märchen*, or *Sicilian Folktales*, in 1870, before any major collection was published by an Italian. Luisa Rubini observes that Gonzenbach's tales "accelerarono in Italia, indubbiamente, le rilevazioni del racconto orale, fornendo altresì il modello di una raccolta italiana" (54). This was, in fact, a trend that ardently displeased Domenico Comparetti. He refers to Gonzenbach's collection in a letter to Pitrè, lamenting the fact that the Germans had "preceded" them: "ci hanno già preceduto, come in tante altre cose, i tedeschi ed il libro testè pubblicato dalla Gonzenbach toglierà a Lei e a ogni altro italiano il merito di essere il primo a rivolgere a quella ricerca la sua attenzione" ("Epistolario" 276). It is this distaste that first hints at Comparetti's underlying nationalistic tendencies.

But within this Romantic vision of folk traditions a debate focusing on the nature of collected texts arose between supporters of faithful documentation and proponents of artistic re-elaboration. The philological and scientific school of thought came to dominate the field in accordance with Max Müller, who concretely defined folklore scholarship as an historical and anthropological endeavor. The strictly scientific theories of German scholars dominated the scene in Italy as well. The forward to the first edition of "Archivio per lo Studio delle Tradizioni Popolari," in 1882, included a letter to Giuseppe Pitrè from Max Müller, in which the German defines a scientific method of folk-

lore research: “la novella dovrebbe darsi, per quanto è possibile, colle *ipissima verba* del narratore. Questa sarà una precauzione contro quella immoralità di collezioni di novelle, dalla quale abbiamo tanto sofferto. Egli è fuor d’ogni dubbio, che un collettore, il quale ritocchi e abbellisca una novella, andrebbe frustato . . .” (7). The collector’s ultimate goal was to transcribe popular texts with absolute fidelity to the narrator’s telling. Any “poetic” interventions made thereafter would destroy a document’s authenticity.

Though the aforementioned passage was written in 1882, the mul-lerian methodology reverberated in Italy as early as the first years of the folklore movement. Vittorio Imbriani was the first Italian to occupy himself with popular stories. He affirmed the importance of “steno-graphic” transcription, which realized that fidelity to the narrator standardized by Müller. In 1871, Imbriani stated in the preface to his *Novellaja Fiorentina*: “[volevo] ritrarre esattamente la maniera in cui fraseggia e concatena il pensiero del volgo [. . .] Insomma, non ho mutato od omezzo od aggiunto nulla, nulla, nulla” (qtd. in Lo Nigro 7–8). This was also the approach sustained by Giuseppe Pitrè, Alessandro D’Ancona, and Giuseppe Ferraro, for whose collection Domenico Comparetti was the editor. Even Comparetti himself affirmed, in the “Avvertenza” to the *Novelline*, to have reproduced his tales “dalla bocca del popolo [. . .] riferite fedelmente come furono narrate.”

The German theories were well known by Comparetti, who maintained correspondences with Max Müller, Reinhold Kohler, and Karl Hillebrand; the German editor Ermanno Loescher edited and published the *Novelline* as part of the series *Canti e Racconti del Popolo Italiano*. Comparetti was also familiar with folklorists in Italy: he was a good friend and colleague of Alessandro D’Ancona at the university in Pisa; he exchanged many letters with Giuseppe Pitrè; Gherardo Nerucci wrote him often and with a jovial, friendly tone in regards to his attempts to publish Max Müller’s letters (Unpublished letters, “Fondo Domenico Comparetti” Box 10, I/N/5, cc. 274–364); he had a professional—if a bit tempestuous¹—rapport with Angelo De Gubernatis, an absolutely mul-lerian scholar. But even if Comparetti was a part of the scientific school that went against every Romantic sentiment of nostalgia for a sublime and sentimental peasantry, he also maintained “un fervore che potrebbe definirsi romantico per l’idea stessa di tradizione” (Ceserani 799), a fervor evinced by his ample interests: self-taught in many of his studies, he occupied himself with philology—mostly the study of classics—archeology, Greek and Italian dialects, and Italian and Finnish popular literatures. Among his unpublished works found in the “Fondo Domenico Comparetti” rest manuscripts that discuss popular literature from Catalonia, Romania, Greece, Albania, Sardinia, and Sicily. Giorgio Pasquali did not hesitate to call his masterpiece, *Virgilio nel Medioevo*, “Romantic”: “Romantico è

il senso vivo per l'unità integrale di tutte le manifestazioni dello spirito in tutta un'età" (29). Comparetti also saw an "integral unity" in the spirit of folktales. In a letter to Giuseppe Pitrè from April 24, 1870, the philologist reasoned:

Ormai è cosa di cui non si può più dubitare che una quantità di quei racconti che i tedeschi chiamano *Märchen* ritrovasi diffusa presso tutti i popoli d'Europa (senza dire di altri extraeuropei) e si ritrovano di certo o probabilmente anche tutti egualmente diffusi presso tutto il popolo italiano. Quindi com'Ella intende bene, volendo pubblicare racconti locali come bei conti si corre il rischio anzi si ha la certezza di dare molti volumi contenenti tutti un materiale narrativo nella massima parte identico. Supponga per esempio il racconto della *Cenerentola*; qual è il paese italiano in cui non si ritrovi? ("Epistolario" 280)

Comparetti considered the diffusion of different types of folktales a repetition of material. The version of *Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*) told in Monferrato was equal, that is, to the version told in Tuscany. Comparetti's view is also reminiscent of, though slightly less poetic than, Calvino's later statement that folktales are "uguali dappertutto"—universally equal. This interpretation of the diffusion of types, resulting in a certain lack of esteem for the particular variants produced by different regions, allowed the philologist to choose a "best" version, and, through the translation of stories in dialect, to agglomerate the regional traditions into a national one.

When one considers Comparetti's foundational act of translation in which he moves from the dialect—that "ipissima verba" of the narrator—to common Italian, it is evident that he did not maintain the scientific "rules" outlined by Müller and by Imbriani. This detachment from the scientific theories was, in fact, admitted by Comparetti himself in the "Avvertenza" to his *Novelline*, in which the scholar reaffirms the fidelity of his texts, "... salvo che, per ragioni facili ad intendere, ho creduto doverle riferire tutte nella lingua comune." This "salvo che"—or, "except that"—clearly demonstrates a knowing refusal of the mullerian method, however subtle, and a recognition of the opposition that inherently exists between scientific transcription and literary translation.

The philologist strove for, in fact, a certain distinction between his collection and others published in the same period in Italy. In a letter to Giuseppe Pitrè from January 1, 1873, anticipating the publication of the *Novelline*, Comparetti wrote: "Questa raccolta di *Novelline Italiane* è compita [sic] con uno scopo e con un metodo speciale che deve distinguerla dalle raccolte parziali di *Novelline lombarde*, *venete*, *sicule*, ecc. Ecc" ("Epistolario" 287). Comparetti wanted to go against the grain with his work: constantly operating with a respect for historical and scientific research, he ultimately strove to create a harmonious

body of “Italian” folktales, a collection that was finally “complete” rather than “partial.” It can be considered that through this adaptation of popular tradition, Comparetti participated in the construction of an Italian nation and of a national language together with erudite men such as Alessandro Manzoni and Graziadio Isaia Ascoli,² who searched for unification of the Italian language not through its “modelli nella Toscana del popolo,” as did Tommaseo, but “tra gli uomini di studio e di cultura, nella ricca varietà di lingue e dialetti e nelle comunità intellettuali che stavano costruendo la nuova Italia” (Ceserani 801). This “new Italy” was basically an intellectual vision of a nation imposed by “men of studies and culture,” by men foreign to the people that they wished to define. This kind of academic fabrication of unity did, according to Comparetti, maintain a certain historic validity.³

Comparetti wrote to Giuseppe Pitre on April 24, 1870: “naturalmente [...] questa raccolta non comporterebbe l’uso dei vari dialetti, ché sarebbe una torre di Babele, ma si darebbero tutti i racconti in comune e semplice italiano” (“Epistolario” 280). The linguistic choice was “natural” only in accordance with his own vision of national identity, and its realization through linguistic unity. This approach to the language of folktales reprised that of Herder in Germany, of which Cocchiara states: “ammonisce che il genio della lingua è anche il genio della letteratura di una nazione, la quale letteratura deve essere l’espressione dell’anima nazionale” (63). Comparetti retained a similar nationalistic vigor as he gregariously celebrated the “Italian” works of his contemporaries, Pitre and Salvatore Salomone-Marino. He wrote to Pitre on February 10, 1871:

Ella, il sig. Salvatore-Marino e tanti altri in Sicilia e sul continente provano che ormai il sonno della gente italiana è finito anche nel campo intellettuale, e che moto ogni dì più crescente questa si dispone a riaprire al mondo ed al progresso i tesori dell’animo suo. (“Epistolario” 284)

In the period after Italy’s unification, Comparetti saw an awakening of his country after the “sleep” of the previous years. He uses Romantic expressions—“the treasures of her soul,” for example—to discuss the scientific research of Italian folklorists. It is also telling that Comparetti speaks of the “Italian” people, while Pitre’s and Salomone-Marino’s work was almost exclusively in regards to Sicilian traditions. It is clear that even if Comparetti had claimed to complete a faithful scientific work, he continually looked toward a vivacious spirit common to all regions of Italy, one that could only be synonymous with that national spirit unearthed by the Grimms and by Herder in Germany.

It has already been said that folklore scholars, even those that were more objective or scientific, approached popular literature as a representation of a certain popular spirit—or definitive character—in regards to the source culture. Comparetti’s unifying approach presumed

that this spirit was on a national scale, and that it existed not in the particulars of each minute population, but in the general fantasy of the tales themselves, which could be presented nationally by means of translation. Other folklorists believed that songs and stories were not merely that, but were tools with which they could access the cultural complexity of the people that told them. Each version, therefore, was important for its particulars, for those aspects which distinguished it from another region's. Pitrè wrote of popular songs: "rileggendone qualcuno, vengono in campo codesti ricordi che, come ognuno sa, possono, se ben indovinati, se applicati con assennatezza, farsi ausiliari della storia" (qtd. in Cocchiara 171). We must consider that for Pitrè, this "auxiliary" function of popular literatures corresponded to folktales as well. According to Cocchiara: "sta di fatto che in tutte le sue ricerche il metodo storico-filologico fu per il Pitrè un mezzo e non mai un fine" (172). The spirit of the "awakened" people in the Sicilian's research, which for Comparetti represented an Italian nation, was in reality the spirit of a very small population; and Pitrè, in the same period in which his studies reached more and more regions of Sicily, and covered various cultural elements (games, rites, medicines), became ever more scrupulous with his research. In his collections, Pitrè demonstrated a linguistic and historical care that established him as the true leader of folklore research in Italy.

The Sicilian scholar labored over the particularities of each text he collected, and also insisted upon the need to present all variants of each song and each tale (a fidelity with which Comparetti agreed regarding songs, but to which he was explicitly opposed in terms of stories). Pitrè wrote to Comparetti on August 12, 1870 about the possible need to include a glossary of terms to facilitate comprehension of his *Canti*:

Intanto son tuttavia perplesso per un vocabolario che crederei dover aggiungere all'opera [la seconda edizione dei *Canti Siciliani*], per la perfetta intelligenza delle voci. Una stessa voce nelle varie parlate significa più cose, come una stessa cosa è significata con più voci [. . .]. Necessario registrar tutti i vocaboli e le frasi spiegate nelle 1500 note apposte finora? È necessario coniugare uno stesso verbo secondo le parlate più importanti? ("Epistolario" 282)

This linguistic care was also evident in his work with folktales. Referring to his *Fiabe, Novelle e Racconti Popolari Siciliani*, he emphasized the importance of recording and presenting different versions: "seguendo un gruppo della raccolta si farà chiaro come si sia andata modificando una novella" (qtd. in Cocchiara 162). The variants were, for Pitrè, elements that could not be sacrificed. Max Müller, in the famous letter that introduced the "Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari," affirmed: ". . . la stessa novella, tutte le volte che ciò è possi-

bile, dovrebbe venire raccolta da sorgenti differenti e da differenti località, e gli elementi che sono comuni a tutte da quelli che sono peculiari a una o più soltanto" (6). Comparetti himself applauded the Sicilian for his efforts in a letter from April 20, 1875, commenting on Pitre's *Fiabe*:

Un santo e nobile ardore traspare d'ogni dove nell'opera sua estremamente laboriosa, e il vederlo fa piacere e consola come raro esempio nella scoraggiata apatia dei tempi nostri . . . L'opera sua è e rimarrà a lungo la maggior di tal genere e che si abbia in Italia. ("Epistolario" 297)

One sees in Pitre's work a scrupulousness that was in reality completely in contrast with Comparetti's work of translation, a work in which the variants, whether in regards to language or content, were not important. In an academic field dominated by the documentation of particular variants, the emphasis was placed not on the so-called common ground of folktales, but on the conservation of microscopic cultures. Salomone-Marino explains: ". . . è carità di patria e dovere di storico il raccogliere e conservare le ultime immagini di un popolo che fino a ieri ebbe una spiccata individualità, della quale ha fatto ora spontaneo sacrificio rientrando nell'unità della gran famiglia italiana" (10). Lamenting the new nation and its destructive force in regards to minute populations, and in turn in regards to their literatures, Salomone-Marino ironically sees patriotism in the conservation of regionalist traditions. Comparetti distinguished himself with his nationally oriented collection—a detachment, unfortunately, that rendered the collection ineffectual within the mainstream of folklore scholarship.

Observations on "Novelline Popolari Italiane."

The *Novelline* are part of a greater series, *Canti e Racconti del Popolo Italiano*, edited by Comparetti himself and his friend Alessandro D'Ancona; it was a work aimed at creating a national collection of popular texts—songs and tales—that would unify and elevate, in the words of Vittorio Imbriani, "il pensiero dei volghi delle diverse province italiane" (qtd. in Cocchiara 129). Imbriani was one of the series' contributors, and he celebrated it simultaneously in regards to the unifying nature of popular literatures and the linguistic differentiation of the Italian regions: he exalted, that is, diversity within national unity. According to Imbriani, the goal of the series was indeed to honor and reinforce Italian regional dialects ("i volghi delle diverse province"), a vision absolutely contradictory to Comparetti's linguistic ideology. In fact, only two of the eight volumes in the series were presented in the "common language:" the *Novelline*, and *Fiabe Mantovane* by Isaia Vicentini, which was translated into Italian according to Comparetti's criteria (Calvino, "Fiabe italiane" XXXIX). But even this Mantuan collection, though strongly influenced by Comparetti's principles,

maintained an essentially regionalistic nature, focusing its attention solely on the literature of one area. Comparetti, then, was alone in writing with the explicit objective of nationalizing tradition itself.

As early as 1870, just after the publication of Pitre's *Canti Siciliani* and shortly after that of Imbriani's *Novellaja Fiorentina*, Comparetti began work on his collection of Italian folktales. He wrote to Pitre in that year requesting some Sicilian material from the collector. In the already cited letter from April 24, 1870, in which Comparetti commented on the diffusion of folktales, he also individuated his fundamental motives for the collection. He affirmed that songs could be collected according to regionalist criteria, but in regards to tales:

Non così per quanto concerne i racconti. La meglio dunque sarebbe di fare una raccolta generale intitolata *Conti (o novelline) popolari italiani*, dando nel testo la versione migliore e più completa di ciascun racconto, scelta fra quelle raccolte in varie parti d'Italia da ciascun collaboratore, e nelle note le varianti più degne di attenzione. Così han fatto i Grimm pei racconti tedeschi e l'Afanasiev pei russi ecc. ("Epistolario" 279–280)

This letter reveals Comparetti's intentions for the *Novelline*. He regarded the Grimms and Afanasiev as models for his collection; the unity that they had found in their folktales served as an ideological foundation, and the national completeness that they had created in their book represented a definitive objective. In essence, only folktales, diffused beyond a single region or a sole dialect, could constitute a true, interregional corpus within the traditionally heterogeneous literature. Comparetti saw the new Italy as a complete and united nation, and believed that popular literature should be presented as such: folktales represented a "common ground" from which nationalist sentiment could emerge.

Comparetti certainly wanted to maintain a certain level of "science" within his research as well, but not in the same manner as other scholars of the time. He wrote a letter to Pitre on December 3, 1880, in which he presented his plan for the publication of more volumes of the *Novelline*:

Ma ho già pronto il materiale per due volumi di novelline che presto potranno andare sotto il torchio ed ho già segnato le linee generali in una introduzione scientifica a questa raccolta della quale sarà forse la parte più nuova e più importante, non soltanto per l'Italia ma anche l'estero ove le raccolte sono molte ma i lavori storici e sintetici sulla novellina popolare sono assai scarsi e poco profondi. ("Epistolario" 300)

It is clear that Comparetti's scope was scientific, but it is also evident that he emphasized not an analysis of the history of each tale (as did Pitre), or of each population (like Salomone-Marino), but of folktales in general: a kind of comparative folklore that incorporated all of Europe. His method of literal translation was therefore guided by these com-

parativist motives: he looked to present a national, yet authentic tradition. In order to realize this goal, he maintained idiomatic phrases, syntax, terms, narrative interventions, and local details. Ultimately, however, this double-nature would fall short of synthesis. Though Comparetti utilized Italian as a glue to unite his popular stories in a national macrotext, his preservation of the narrator's dictation indicates that fidelity to each microtext (though limited by translation) prevailed over the whole organism. With that in mind, one sees that a conflict of motives existed since the beginning of Comparetti's operation. Through the translation into Italian, the scholar intended to unite his texts in an Italian corpus; at the same time, the literal translation created many different styles, narrative voices, and local details (linguistic, cultural, and geographic) within the collection, demonstrating instead the extremely heterogeneous nature of "Italian" folktales, and inhibiting the desired macrotextual unity.

In the first place, the tales' titles in the *Novelline* present evidence of the literal translation, and therefore, a decidedly non-literary one (and, as we have said, the ideal macrotext founds itself upon a literary nature). The title of a given popular text was almost always a collector's intervention, assigned by the scholar to facilitate cataloguing, and usually originated completely outside of the narrative context (Lavinio 116). Titles were therefore relatively generic, and often had the function of a "theme-title." Comparetti, in his faithful translation, certainly maintained each of the titles given by his various contributors. In two cases, for example, different tales share equivalent titles: *Le tre sorelle* (VI) and *Le tre sorelle* (XXV); and *Il figliuolo del re, stregato* (IX) and *Il principe stregato* (LXVI). Despite the parallel titles, these are completely different stories. In the first case, VI was collected in Basilicata by Raffaello Bonari, while XXV came from Monferrato and Giuseppe Ferraro; in the second case, both tales hail from Monferrato, but given an evident difference in narrative style, were surely told in two different settings, possibly by different narrators, and therefore could have been catalogued with similar titles without the risk of confounding the collector. Within the general collection, though, this repetition of titles creates confusion for the reader, and fidelity to the "original" title—that is, to the microtext—in reality impedes the presentation of a unified corpus. Ironically, adherence to the title, given that it was an element of the text added away from the narrative moment (that is, it was not a recording, but an extraneous supplement assigned by the collector), represents a transmission of decidedly non-authentic material, reproducing a collector's intervention rather than the narrator's word. Maybe a more marked example of this "erred" reproduction appears in the first paragraph of *La Signora delle sette vele* (XIV), in which the hero becomes Jesus Christ's pastor. The second time that Christ's name appears, it is written "G.C." (for "Gesù Cristo," 55), which certainly is

an element added by the collector, wanting to save time in his registration by using short-hand, or by Comparetti himself. The figure is called "Gesù" from this point on, which sounds more natural for an oral storyteller: in any case, it is difficult to imagine a narrator using monograms to tell of his characters.

A frequent repetition of tale types, or of similar tales, is also evident in Comparetti's collection, even if the philologist explicitly declared at the beginning of his project his desire to avoid such repetition ("Epistolario" 280). *La bella dai capelli d'oro* (XVI) is similar to the second half of *La Signora delle sette vele*; *Federica* (XXXVI) reminds us of *I quattordici pittori* (XV); the central quest in *Margheritina* (X) and that in *Filo d'Oro* (XXXIII) have concrete connections despite their different sources; and *L'uccellino che parla* (XXX) is almost identical to *Le tre sorelle* (VI).

These last two cases are also distinguished by thematically and stylistically parallel narrative moments, indicating perhaps a fundamental version from which the two variants evolved. The first (X and XXXIII) presents a particular moral theme common to both tales. In *Margheritina*, the heroine travels to the witches palace in order to retrieve their treasure, held in a small chest; having found the chest, Margheritina begins her journey home, but before arriving, opens the box, and its contents—a hen with golden chicks—escapes. The narrator explains the action with a general judgment linked to typical masculine prejudice: "perché le donne sono curiose, lei volle vedere quel che c'era nella cassetta" (42). The motif recalls Pandora's box (both for the "moral" and for the central object), a narrative type repeated in *Filo d'Oro*. In this tale, the heroine proceeds to the Orc's palace to retrieve a small chest that contains a beautiful sound and song that must be presented at the prince's wedding. The treasure found, the girl opens the box and its contents—the sound and song—fly away. The narrator describes: "le venne la curiosità di sapere com'erano fatti il suono e il canto chiusi nella scatolina; non poté resistere alla voglia" (138). The motive of curiosity is equal in both cases; and though the narrator of *Filo d'Oro* does not pronounce the general judgment upon women in this moment as in *Margheritina*, he instead recalls a moral intervention made at the beginning of the tale. Recounting a mother's desire to see the heroine's hidden beloved (*Filo d'Oro* himself), an action which sets in motion the tragic events of the story, the narrator affirms: "La curiosità delle donne guasta ogni cosa" (134). This initial narrative movement serves to announce a guiding theme for the tale: keeping in mind this moral declaration, the reader interprets the young girl's blunder as another example of the destructive curiosity of all women, exactly how it is reported in the analogous text. Given that the initial motif of the mother is not present in *Margheritina*, the narrator is constrained to pronounce the judgment at the moment in which the heroine opens the

box, consolidating the circularity of its counterpart. In either case, the male hero (the king's son in the former and Filo d'Oro in the latter) uses his magic wand to restore the treasure to the chest, and the two protagonists are married.

The connections between *L'uccellino che parla* and *Le tre sorelle* are still more accentuated and explicit. While certain narrative particulars distinguish *Margheritina* from *Filo d'Oro*, the motifs in this second pair of stories—the first from Pisa, the second from Basilicata—coincide more intrinsically, both for the central quest and for narrative style. Both tales begin with three poor sisters chatting, each saying how they would like to become part of the king's household. The older sisters elaborate fairly underhanded schemes to become more powerful, while the youngest sister simply declares that she wishes to marry the king's son, who happens to pass by their window at that moment; he marries the young girl and also gives the older sisters that which they desired. The older sisters are taken with envy, so in time they kidnap the royal couple's children, cast them into the sea, and put animals in their place. The king's son, at war and away from home, receives news that his wife has birthed animals. He responds in a letter that, despite their misfortune, he still loves his wife and children; but the cruel sisters intercept the letter, and exchange it for one that orders the heroine enclosed within a brick wall. At this point the narrator returns to the lost children. The Pisan narrator says simply: “Ma torniamo ai bambini buttati in mare” (119). The version from Basilicata is a bit longer: “Lasciamo la casa del re, e andiamo un po' a vedere che cosa ne sia delle tre povere creature innocenti, che le due cattive sorelle fecero gettare in mare” (25). These are two rare cases in the *Novelline* in which this type of transition is utilized to propel a story. The typical tale maintains a strictly linear narrative, while those that consist of two narrative threads move from one to the other with a simple “intanto”—or “meanwhile.” Here, instead, two distinct narrators choose a tactic common in epic Chivalric literature—reminiscent of the famous “Lasciamo . . . torniamo . . .” of the *entrelacement* so prevalent in Boiardo and Ariosto—to return to an interrupted storyline. The fact that the peculiar trope occurs at the same point in two versions of the same tale-type indicates that these are, in fact, two derivations of a single—and most likely fairly recent—source. In this case we see an effective repetition of the same tale, explicitly contrasting the original motives elaborated by Comparetti for his general collection of Italian folktales.

In addition to the repetitions of titles and texts that tend to weaken the collection's macrotextual character, the prevalent dialectal phrases in various narrations, included certainly in order to maintain bits of local linguistic color in each text, indicate diverse narrative voices and ultimately produce varied style and inconsistent language. At this point, it is necessary to clarify that the use of vernacular or dialectal

phrases is not in itself the cause of Comparetti's stylistic inconsistencies; Italo Calvino also utilized common dialectisms in his re-elaborations. The difference rests, however, in each translator's capacity to incorporate them into the grander organism of the book. While Comparetti's literal translations lead to a stark contrast between the common language and dialectal phrases within the same tale, Calvino's literary sensibilities allow a more poetic use of vernacular Italian. Giuseppe Cocchiara reported in a letter to Calvino: "Anche l'uso che hai fatto delle 'frasi dialettali' è abilissimo e non disturba il lettore" (Calvino, "Cocchiara" 403). In Comparetti's translations, however, the infiltration of various dialects reveals, in essence, a methodological inconsistency in regards to language and style that ultimately does "disturb" the reader.

Dialectal phrases (italicized here) are frequently present in characters' direct discourses: the "Gnor si" of *Geppone*, from *Mugello* (VII) and the "Gnorsi" of the fisherman in *Lionbruno*, from *Basilicata* (XLI) maintain a colloquial, but linguistically and typographically inconsistent character; the cruel brothers from *Monferrato* in *Il Mondo sotterraneo* (XXXV) challenge the hero: "Come *hai core* di dire che hai ucciso il gigante, tu che sei un *omicino*?" Similarly, vernacular contaminations enter into Comparetti's narrative. One reads, for example: the brothers in *I tre ragazzi* (XIX) want only to "*liticare*" in order to win the king's daughter; the king's son in *Federica* (XXXVI) loves his wife so much that "*la credeva un angiole*"; one of the baker's companions in *La Palla d'oro* (XL), when attacked by the golden orb, "*dàlli pedate alla palla!*"; in *Il fiorentino* (XLIV), the hero ventures to uncover what will happen to his companion in the hands of a giant, and the narrator describes: "*quatto, quatto, gli va appresso per curiosità.*" Those texts from Montale in Comparetti's collection, contributed by Gherardo Nerucci, present a high level of infiltration from the Tuscan dialect. *Le tre Melangole di Amore* (LXVIII) begins: "*Ci fu una volta un figliolo d'un re, che a nessuno era riescito mai di farlo ridere [. . .] questo giovanotto 'gli era affacciato alla finestra...*" The truncation of possessive pronouns occurs in other tales ("*la su' reputazione e il su' onore*"); and there are lexical variants as well: "*arrispose*"; "*gli ci volle del bono . . .*"; "*un par d'ore.*"

This fidelity to the language of the microtext is also evident in the traces of orality maintained in many of the tales. Sarah Cruso, in her commentary on Calvino's *Fiabe*, notes that the author removed many oral elements in his rewriting process: *appelli fatici* (phatic appeals), which often take the form of rhetorical questions aimed at the audience; *commenti* (comments), or exclamatory expressions; and *formule di regia* (organizational formulae) which signal the passage from one action to another (75–76). These forms, erased by Calvino in order to render his texts more literary and to negate the stylistic elements that distinguished one narrative voice from another, are left in tact by

Comparetti in order to maintain an oral—and presumably authentic—effect within each tale.

The transitional moment in *Le tre sorelle* (VI), discussed above, provides a clear example of Cruso's organizational formulae, but also introduces a direct interaction between the narrator and the audience. The narrator returns to the lost children, then appeals to the public: "Credete voi, miei signori, che sieno proprio affogate? Che? Altro che affogare! Sentite, signori, sentite se non fu propriamente giustizia di Dio" (25). This phatic appeal is certainly not a literary strategy (even the *entrelacement* that precedes it was, for Italian epic-chivalric poets, a way of imitating the oral character of ancient epic poems); instead it represents a recording of a direct interaction between the oral narrator and a real group of listeners. In addition to the example cited above, there are many points at which Comparetti's narrators literally turn to their audience. To introduce the cruel brother's trickery in *La Signora delle sette vele*, the narrator commands: "Sentite cosa fece" (57); further on, telling of the trial that the hero will face, the narrator invites the audience to identify with his troubles: "Immaginate poi voi che forza dovette fare per resistere . . ." (59); Geppone eats after a long period of starvation and the narrator exclaims: "figuratevi con quanta allegria!" (32); and when Lionbruno approaches a cabin in the forest, the narrator tells that the Voria is inside, then asks: "(sapete, signori miei, chi è la Voria? Niente meno che la madre dei venti)" (178).

The *commenti* of the narrators are also faithfully recorded: most often they are exclamatory, and at times take the form of prayer. To accentuate the futility of the imprisoned heroine's lamentations in *L'Innamorato d'una Statua* (XXIX), the narrator declares: "ma che? Era come dire al muro" (115). Geppone ruins his corrupt patron's dinner party, and the narrator comments: "Credo bene che quel giorno, dopo quel desinare, non abbiano fatto più le funzioni" (35). The beginning of *La Signora delle sette vele* presents Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary as characters, and the narrator parenthetically prays upon the introduction of the latter: "(sia lodata per sempre)" (55). Another prayer is pronounced when the Devil arrives in *Lionbruno*: "Il Nemico (Dio ce ne liberi noi e tutto il mondo!) se lo sarebbe preso . . ." (168–169). The rest of the collection is filled with comments of the sort, most frequently in the form of narrative interjections: "Figuratevi!", "Immaginate!", "Guai a lui!/a lei!"

Formule di regia are briefly discussed above in regards to *L'uccellino che parla* and *Le tre sorelle*, but two additional examples are as follows: in *Il drago*, the narrator reintroduces the king who has gone away to war by announcing: "Intanto la guerra era finita" (74); the narrator of *La Nuvolaccia*, in order to skip a repetitive moment, condenses it: "per farla corta, gli accade quello che era accaduto all'altro fratello . . ." (132).

Beyond the forms outlined by Cruso, one sees other textual elements transmitted directly from oral narrations. In order to conclude a tale, the narrator will often pronounce a kind of punch-line: a first-person remark used to bring the fantastical story back into the quotidian reality in which it began. At times the narrator defends the credibility of the story's happenings. *La Signora delle sette vele* (XIV) ends: "Così hanno raccontato a me. Se poi voi non ci credete, andate a vedere;" and the narrator concludes in *I quattordici pittori* (XV): "... e se li vuoi trovar ancora là, e tu vacci." Other times the narrator includes himself as a tangential character who is not permitted to participate in the grand celebrations at the end of the tale, contrasting the distant, fantastical world of the story with the immediate world of the narrator and audience. In *Il palazzo incantato* (XXVII), the narrator laments: "Poi fecero un desinare, ma a me non m'hanno dato nulla; m'hanno chiuso l'uscio dietro le spalle;" *Le tre sorelle* (XXV) concludes: "E io ero dietro all'uscio, e per mangiare all'osteria me ne son ito, e il racconto è bello e finito." In other situations, these interventions serve to integrate a meta-narrative character into the tale, in which the narrator may reinforce his story's nature as such, starkly distancing it from the communal reality. Both *La Nuvolaccia* (XXXII) and *La regina sfortunata* (XLII) are simply wrapped up: "e così è finita la novella." *Il cestello* (XXXI), a text from Jesi left in the Meridian dialect ends: "Larga la foja, stretta la via, dite la vostra ch'io detto la mia." This final punch-line effectively demonstrates the original narrative situation of the tale, in which the storyteller calls for other tales from members of the crowd. The punch-lines of each tale are, in this manner, representations of absolutely oral moments recorded by the collector, and later faithfully translated by Comparetti in his quest for scientific validity.

Comparetti also leaves intact references to specific locations, which could confound a reader unfamiliar with the area or with the culture from which each tale originates. Comparetti himself seems to recognize this distancing effect, at least in its extreme. At the end of *La penna dell'uccello grifone* (XXVIII) the philologist is constrained to insert a footnote to explain the narrator's final punch-line: "E fecero un bel desinare e a me mi misero dietro all'uscio, e mi diedero un ovo da bere. Son andato a Castelnovo, da Castelnovo a Via Levata. Andiamo a veder dove son passato" (114). The note defines Via Levata: "via ch'è in quei luoghi, la quale andava nelle Gallie" (114). This need for explanation, on the one hand, reminds the general reader how detached he is from the original narrative situation, and on the other—ironically—creates an element of strict inauthenticity: in his attempt to preserve the local atmosphere of the tale, Comparetti creates a situation in which he is constrained to employ a decidedly non-oral and non-popular technique: the footnote. The action is of course understandable, and tends to show not the shortcomings of Comparetti as a col-

lector of folktales, or as an organizer of the anthology, but of the concept of a national folktale tradition in itself. Comparetti recognized that the authenticity of the tale is challenged when local details are omitted, yet this same adherence to tradition renders the tale inaccessible and unidentifiable to a national public.

Examples of local information arise in the narratives of other tales as well. Occasionally narrators refer to nearby cities: in his travels, Lionbruno “arriva in una gran città, come sarebbe a dire Napoli . . .” (174), Naples being the largest (and certainly the most well-known) in the minds of the people in Basilicata. The Roman reader, however, would not be as struck by the analogy. In the final punch-line of *Le sette paia di scarpe di ferro* (LI) the narrator declares: “E tutti si messero a mangiare e bere, ma a me mi donarono un paio di scarpe che avean più buchi che il castello di Milano” (219); the listener in Monferrato, familiar with the castle in Milan, understands the joke, but again the Roman reader may not grasp the comparison. Seemingly secondary details within a tale can also render a microtext less accessible to the “foreign” reader: currency, for example. Most often, characters in the *Novelline* spend or earn “quattrini,” generic coins circulated in all of Italy in the nineteenth century, but the protagonist in *Cannelora* (XLVI) awards four “piastre” to a pair of gardeners, and the hero of *Lo specchio incantato* (LXII) steals “marenghi” from the thieves who have captured him. *Cannelora* was collected from Basilicata, where the “piastra,” a coin adopted from various Arab countries (and still used in Turkey, Egypt, and Syria) points to the heavy influence of Arab cultures on southern points of the Italian peninsula. *Lo specchio incantato*, rather, is a tale from Monferrato where the French currency, coined in 1801 in honor of Napoleon’s victory at Marengo, would have been well recognized. These local moneys, however, present a high level of socio-cultural heterogeneity within the literary macrotext: ultimately, they disturb the foreign reader and slow the rapid pace that normally drives folk narrative. Such local particulars within the tales—and as a result, the collection as a whole—are rendered inaccessible to a national audience.

Oral interventions and the adoption of local details reinforce the rapport between the narrator and the listener—typical of the oral experience of traditional folktales—but they also indicate a stark difference between the narrative situation within a small community, and the experience of a solitary reader. The oral narrator turns to a group of listeners in an extraordinarily performative moment; this explicit interpersonal communication is an integral part of the narrative experience, and makes its way into popular texts by means of transcription. The literary narrator, however, does not turn to a group, but to a solitary reader for whom the written reproduction of the original performance can be a distraction: a highly stylized moment unsuitable for his situation. For example, of the seventy texts in *Novelline Popolari Italiane*,

forty-two begin with the standard “c’era una volta;” certainly, in each case, the opening is a faithful translation, but the continuous repetition of the incipit renders the book as a whole monotonous and “cold,” as Italo Calvino reports. In contrast, Calvino changes many of his tales’ openings: only thirty-two of his two hundred *Fiabe* begin with “c’era una volta”—19% in comparison with the 60% in Comparetti. Franco Mugnaini declares that for Calvino, the tendency to vary the initial sentence was an appeal to the complex logic of the anthology as a whole—of the macrotext (131). We deduce, then, that Comparetti’s invariability is, in effect, a rejection of that logic in favor of the microtext.

A prevalent incontinuity of verb tense also exists in the *Novelline*, as the narration vacillates from the remote past to the present, even in a single sentence. One will also notice inconsistencies in spelling, indicative of the lack of a standard written Italian at the time: Comparetti writes “giovane” and “giovine,” “cuore” and “core” within a single tale, demonstrating a blurred distinction between the dialect and the “common language,” even in the mind of the translator. Of course, these are all minute details, and, when standing on their own, they have little effect on the reader’s experience; but, amassed as they are, they tend to create pervasive stylistic and narrative inconsistencies that slow the reading of the tales. These aspects diminish the pleasure that may be found in the book, and therefore its effect as a national collection of folktales, at least according to the criteria later elaborated by Calvino, in which a collection must be “popular” in regards not only to its origins, but also its destination.

While Comparetti strove to demonstrate unity within the folktale tradition in Italy, it seems that he could not resist the temptation to prioritize the comparativist and scientific research that guided most of his studies. The philologist left five texts in the original dialect (numbers II from Monferrato, XII from Jesi, XXI from Basilicata, XXXI also from Jesi, and LII from Catania); he offers a brief and vague explanation in the “Avvertenza,” stating that some tales were published in the original dialect “come saggi”—as samples. It is probable that he saw in these tales a profound local originality. He had written to Pitrè: “naturalmente se un paese italiano offerisse racconti suoi propri distinti per indole e per carattere questi si pubblicherebbero in un volume separato” (“Epistolario” 280): unable to publish a separate volume, Comparetti included five tales of the sort in his anthology, possibly aimed at documenting “proper” texts belonging to specific regions, and in turn demonstrating his own rigorous philological labor.

Ironically, in the eyes of Comparetti’s peers, it was this scholastic effort within the general translation that accentuated the lack of the then-standardized scientific methods in the rest of the collection. After the volume’s publication, Adolfo Mussafia wrote a letter to Alessandro

D'Ancona criticizing Comparetti for having abandoned various dialects in reproducing most tales: "ma perché non tutte nel dialetto rispettivo! È vero, l'esempio dei Grimm autorizza a una trascrizione (giacché si vede che non è altro, e che il valente pubblicatore, intendo il C., si astenne dal *tradurre*), ma pure le storielle in dialetto di Jesi, Basilicata, Monferrato, si leggono con molto maggior diletto che quelli delle regioni eguali trascritte in lingua comune" (qtd. in "Epistolario" 296). Beyond being scandalized by the translation, Mussafia points to the lack of macrotextuality in Comparetti's collection, perceiving a vast difference between the local color in those tales left in their respective dialects, and its absence in the translated texts. The *Novelline* were missing both scientific quality—which would have made the collection usable as a tool for folklorists—and artistic valor—which would have rendered it accessible to a non-academic reader. Mussafia's reference to the Grimms implies an inclination that Comparetti did not reach their standard, nor his own goal of reproducing the "Italian spirit." It is important to note, however, that according to Comparetti it was not necessary to impose stylistic or narrative unity upon Italy's folktales. He believed that the tales already contained a "common ground," and strove to reveal that preexisting unity through the "common language." Ultimately, however, the scholar's faith was insufficient to create a macrotext of "Italian" folktales, and his methods opposed the scientific principles that dominated contemporary folklore scholarship.

Reception of the "Novelline."

It may seem strange that in an era that Remo Ceserani describes as characterized by "nationalistic surges," and by "edifications of new monuments" to the antique past (798, my translation), a collection of antique popular tales filled with nationalistic motives would not be successful, let alone would be left unfinished. But there are concrete reasons for the incompleteness of the collection. Comparetti himself was not completely dedicated to the anthology, but instead prioritized other studies. While his prolific research in archeology and other fields distinguished him as a leader in the foundation of Italian intellectual-ity, he was unable to present his comparativist approach to folklore scholarship as a definitive method of study, given that the scientific character of his other works was not present in his preparation of the *Novelline*. Comparetti was consequently unable to complete the collection in the way in which he had envisioned it. In addition, the differentiation between his collection and those of other folklorists of the time created a lack of academic readership; and in reality, an audience of national character at which Comparetti could aim his "common" collection did not exist within the general Italian population, which was still fractured by regionalism and dialect.

Giorgio Pasquali attributes the incompleteness of the collection completely to the indifference of Comparetti himself: “Del ’75 è la bella raccolta di *Novelline Popolari Italiane* [. . .]. Poi parve disinteressarsene, e donò ad altri materiale che aveva seguitato a raccogliere” (26). This hypothesis merits some clarification in regards to the “disinterest” of the scholar. Since the conception of the work—and not simply after the publication of the first volume—Comparetti did not consider his work with the *Novelline* a primary task: in the years in which he compiled his anthology of Italian folktales, he contributed greatly (and more significantly) to the realization of modern Italian intellectuality in general. His interest in archeology, ancient scrolls, and linguistics continued alongside his work with popular literatures: in fact, Comparetti considered these to be more important studies, and prioritized them over his organization of Italian tales, creating a certain inactivity in respect to the realization of the *Novelline*. This lack of work in turn incited delays in the publication of the first volume, placing the release of the book within an academic climate dominated by scientific research.

The distinction between Comparetti’s theoretical basis and that of the field’s veritable figure-head, Giuseppe Pitrè, has already been demonstrated, but a methodological distinction is also quite evident in the intensity with which Pitrè operated, and the distracted mode in which Comparetti organized his tales. Macconi and Pintaudi observe:

Se praticamente esclusivo è l’impegno di Pitrè per il folklore, costante è l’interesse per le tradizioni letterarie popolari (poesia popolare e novellistica) che Domenico Comparetti coltiva parallelamente all’epigrafia greca, alla papirologia, alla linguistica, all’archeologia. Lo studio della lettera popolare, per il materiale stesso che offre alla ricerca, è per Comparetti un momento di riposo e immediata gratificazione a cui pensare anche quando l’attività di studio è rivolta ai papiri e alle iscrizioni greche. (“Epistolario” 273)

We have already seen in the letter from April 20, 1875 that Comparetti himself applauded the Sicilian’s academic toil. Comparetti, however, did not complete his research of Italian folktales with the same rigor or scrupulousness. He wrote to Pitrè in December, 1880, explaining his intentions (still so late) to publish the remaining two volumes of the *Novelline*: “Per ora sono occupato da studi più ardui; ma spero che non tarderò a cercare un po’ di riposo in queste piacevoli ricerche e ad effettuare questi lavori progettati” (“Epistolario” 300). In reality, the collection was always a secondary occupation for Comparetti: a work that was hardly “arduous,” but instead adopted for “a bit of rest.” As a result, the philologist’s vision would not be realized. In January, 1873, Comparetti had written to Pitrè describing the planned structure of his collection: there would be three volumes, with illustrations by Comparetti himself, a catalogue for each tale comparing it with corresponding versions from Italy and elsewhere, and a bibliographical es-

say on tales already published in Italy. The letter demonstrates Comparetti's grand hopes for the collection, but also outlines a series of projects that would supplement the tales themselves, each requiring extensive research. Comparetti's seemingly apocryphal catalogue, for example, is reminiscent of the later work by Aarne or Thompson, each of whom dedicated great portions of their academic careers to unraveling folktale types. Comparetti, on the other hand, stopped short of even illustrating the tales in his first volume, implying that the grandiose nature of his plans may have required more labor than he had expected, or at least more than he was able to commit in addition to his primary studies in other fields. Tellingly, the letter was sent from Nice and indicates that Comparetti was not occupied with folklore research at the time, but with another of his various projects. On June 19, 1873, Comparetti confessed to Pitrè: "... quest'anno il mio traslocamento da Pisa a Firenze ha inceppato i miei lavori; ma l'anno prossimo spero potermi occupare di questa pubblicazione già da tempo promessa" ("Epistolario" 288). The move from Pisa to Florence was made, in fact, to assume a post at the Istituto di Studi Superiori di Firenze (today the Università), an academically founded event, but still a distraction in regards to his works in progress. In April, 1874, Comparetti wrote to Pitrè again, recounting his travels: again to Nice, then to Rome and Naples "per dare un'ultima occhiata ad un papiro ercolanese" ("Epistolario" 293). In the same letter, Comparetti describes himself as a "viaggiatore incorreggibile," always kept away from home on account of his primary studies. He announced another trip on June 14, 1874: "Verso la metà di Luglio partirò al solito per un lungo viaggio non so se in Austria o altrove e non tornerò che a Novembre" ("Epistolario" 295). It is clear that Comparetti preferred his more "arduous" research, and therefore was frequently travelling in order to expand upon it, consequently putting his work with Italian folktales in the background of his primary interests. It appears that for two years in the period between the initiation of the anthology in 1870 and its publication in 1875, Comparetti did not work at all on the *Novelline*: he was interrupted in 1873 by his move to Florence, and again in the spring of 1874 by his research in Nice, Rome, and Naples; the summer and fall of that year he continued his "incorrigible" travels. In this way, Comparetti began to sacrifice editorial support. In December, 1873, Ermanno Loescher wrote to Comparetti, referring to the 1874 trip as a reason for not publishing the volume in that year, as Comparetti had planned,⁴ but to wait for the scholar's return to Italy. Loescher declares his intentions to proceed with the publication of Antonio Gianandrea's collection of Italo-Dalmatian folk songs, having already held the manuscript for some time, along with many other non-specified projects. Loescher still awaited Comparetti's manuscript, and, making note of the philologist's tendency to travel during the

summer, reasons that it would be impossible to publish the *Novelline* before the fall of 1874, or even the winter (Unpublished letter, "Fondo Domenico Comparetti" Box 8. I/L/27. cc. 31–32). The publication of the first volume occurred, therefore, after mullerian methods had been stabilized as the paradigm for folklore research in Italy.

The delay was perhaps a mortal blow for Comparetti's collection, which, while conceived in the formative years of Italian folklore scholarship, was completed in an unsuited era. Before 1870—the year in which Comparetti introduced the project to Pitre—only Imbriani and De Gubernatis had published collections of popular tales, leaving the field open to artistic, academic, and methodological discourse, especially in those years of debate over the question of language and the use of popular Tuscan songs as a model for a standardized Italian (Morazzini). The first date proposed for the *Novelline*'s publication was the summer of 1874, which would have still been an apt environment for Comparetti's novel approach to Italian folklore; but the release was delayed until 1875. In that short span, Bernoni's *Fiabe e Novelle Popolari Veneziane*, Coronidi-Berti's *Novelle Popolari Bolognesi*, and most importantly Pitre's *Fiabe, Novelle e Racconti Popolari Siciliani* were released, the latter immediately distinguishing itself as the future standard for folklore research in Italy.

Mussafia's letter to D'Ancona clearly demonstrates the authority with which the scientific, regionalist method dominated folklore studies. Collections of popular literature, both of songs and tales, became instruments for the conservation of the antique things of the countryside: customs, games, superstitions, and, perhaps most importantly, languages. It was in this academic environment, in 1878, that Comparetti and Loescher reprised discussions of the *Novelline*. On March 16, the editor wrote to the philologist delineating the reasons for which he felt he should not publish additional volumes of the collection. The outcome of the first volume, both financially and academically, was far from what had been expected. At least for all of 1878, the editor would feel capable of offering neither the expenses nor the time needed to publish other volumes. Additionally, keeping in mind the public's preference and seeing an environment unsuitable for a general collection of folktales, Loescher felt it seemed ill-advised to publish a second volume that would ultimately find itself unwelcomed among the readers of folktales, which were almost exclusively scholars (Unpublished letter, "Fondo Domenico Comparetti" Box 8. I/L/27, cc. 35–36). Despite Comparetti's continued desire to publish the rest of the collection, his vision of a national anthology was terminated with this last letter. While the philologist continued to write Loescher, their correspondence never returned to talk of the *Novelline*.

Simply put, Comparetti's collection did not present itself to an explicit audience. Those who would have turned to it for scientific documentation would be disillusioned by the fundamentally non-scientific

translation (even if it was “faithful”); and those that desired an “Italian Grimm” would be distracted by the texts left in dialect and by the general lack of stylistic and literary unity. The *Novelline* were neither socio-cultural documents representative of a real community (ideal microtexts), nor components of a greater Italian folktale corpus (an ideal macrotext). It was, in essence, this “uncertainty” that rendered the work unfruitful both in the academic environment and in the popular mind.

The only critic to occupy himself with the *Novelline Popolari Italiane* (for more than a few paragraphs, at least) was Henry Charles Coote, an English scholar and a colleague of Comparetti's, interested in the origins of certain tales and the relationships among diverse national traditions. Coote wrote *Some Italian Folk-Lore* in “The Folk-Lore Record” in 1878, turning to Comparetti's collection as a sort of database: a tool with which he could elaborate the presence of various tale types in both Italy and France. The commentary, however, does not claim to offer an analysis of Comparetti's work; Coote declares in the first pages: “With [the collection] as a whole I have no business at present, my only intention being to deal with those stories which have their counterparts in France, and not with all of these” (188). The discussion that follows consists of English translations of a number of tales and brief comments on the connections between each tale and its French counterpart. Ultimately, Coote's essay is an observational presentation of material more than a profound analysis of the Italian collection, and, as the most significant academic response to Comparetti's anthology, it reveals how little recognition the *Novelline* gained upon its release. Nonetheless, Coote demonstrates an enduring comparativist capacity at the base of Comparetti's work, and the potential of the *Novelline* to offer an initial step toward a truly “Italian” tradition.

COLIN JOHNSON
Middlebury College

NOTES

¹ The two scholars wrote each other frequently in 1864, but then there is no evident news from De Gubernatis until 1871. On June 28th of that year, he wrote to Comparetti asking to resolve their differences, both professional and personal (Unpublished letters, “Fondo Domenico Comparetti,” Box 4, I/D/23, cc. 22–24 [Citations according to Macconi e Squilloni]. The rapport that Comparetti maintained with De Gubernatis is of interest because it demonstrates a very real and personal conflict among folklore scholars in Italy: a conflict with which Comparetti was explicitly involved.

² Comparetti was also well aware of linguistic theories of the time: he wrote, in fact, an article in “*Rivista Italiana*” in 1863: “Notizie ed Osservazioni in Proposito degli Studi Critici del Prof. Ascoli.”

³ According to Comparetti the wisdom of the “lower” classes was always transmitted from the morality and art of the “superior” class, though often transformed into more popular forms (Cocchiara 131).

⁴ In the same letter to Pittrè from June 14, Comparetti predicted the collection’s release for August of 1874.

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